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EXORCISM, A CUSTOM OF THE BLACK LOLO

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EXORCISM, A CUSTOM OF THE BLACK LOLO

The Lolo people are superstitious. Every time sickness or disaster befalls them, they believe that in this mysterious universe some evil spirits are at work, and the only recourse they have is to ask their Pai-mao [wizard priest] to chant liturgies for the extirpation of bad luck.

In the early summer of 1943 I was engaged in a research study of the Lolo language among the Black Lolo (Heh-I) at the Mou-lien district in Wu-ting, and had occasion to observe their customs and rituals in relation to the translation of the Lolo scriptures. This is because what is recorded in their scriptures is largely the gist of their customs and rituals. So in order to thoroughly understand the Lolo scriptures, it is necessary to become familiar with the customs of their tribe.

An exorcising ceremony was witnessed by me at Wan-teh village. The mistress of the house was a certain Mrs. An Hsiao-tseng, whose nephew had been wounded by bandits and was confined to bed. Although they had secured some herb medicine to be applied to the wounds, she would not believe that the medicine could heal the wounds, contending that they were the result of some evil influence. As long as the evil spirit remained the wounded person could not get well, and she begged leave of me to ask the Pai-mao, Chang Wen-yuan, who was translating the scriptures with me to perform exorcism for her. As I was eager to observe the rite I readily agreed.

Although it was only early summer, the weather was unbearably hot, as Wan-teh was a hollow plain surrounded by mountains and completely dried up for the lack of rainfall in many months. I went to the house after lunch with two Pai-mao, Chang Wen-yuan and Chang tzu-hsin, but the ritual lasted until the starlit night. The whole ceremony consisted of two

755 parts, outdoor and indoor, the former taking up
789 a greater part of the day. In the fierce heat of the sun I observed the performances of Chang Wen-yuan and at the same time asked Chang tzu-hsin for explanations regarding the different rituals and their meanings. Although the hot sun gave me a headache, the thrill of acquiring new knowledge was rewarding. In the following are explained in two parts both the indoor and outdoor rituals of exorcism.

I. Indoor Sacrifice

(1) Preparations

When the Pai-mao arrived at the house to perform exorcism, they began making two effigies with rice straw, one a horse and the other a man astride it. Then they wrapped red and green cloth around the straw figure as his garment. This figure is known to the Lolo as chi-tsu. They took a branch of a cypress tree, cut one end of it into two halves like the two ears of a head, and tied silk threads on them. This branch was supposed to represent the spirit soldiers of the chi-tsu, and called by the Lolo, pu-tsu.

(2) The Basis of the Legend

755 It was said that in very ancient times there
773 were two half brothers, Chang Hsiao and Chang Li.
789 The former was born by his father's first wife, but filial to his stepmother. One day the stepmother became very sick and was on the verge of death beyond any medical cure. Suddenly she had a revelation to the effect that her sickness could be cured by the heart of the phoenix in the imperial palace. So Chang Hsiao sneaked into the palace and stole the phoenix. The prescription was effective and in a few days the patient became well.

But the emperor discovered the theft and had Chang Hsiao arrested and condemned to death. The stepmother heard the news and felt remorseful, saying to her own son, Chang Li: "Son, your elder brother is condemned to death for my sake. His filial piety has moved me greatly. You should die for him in order to show your brotherly love." Chang Li was obedient and went to the execution ground to die for his brother. Being full of filial and fraternal love, Chang Hsiao would not allow his brother to be executed for him. Therefore, at the execution ground the two brothers struggled to die, one for the other. The emperor was moved with compassion by their piety and brotherly love. But the law of the country was fixed and the sentence could not be changed. So he devised a straw effigy to take the place of Chang Hsiao to receive punishment, [28] and the brothers were spared.

Another account has it that Chang Hsiao was a criminal who was promised by a T'ang Emperor as a victim to Heaven. In a certain year during the T'ang dynasty, so the story runs, there was great calamity in the world with people suffering untold hardships. The emperor willed twenty-four heads to Heaven as sacrificial items. When afterwards the calamity was averted, the twenty-four men, including Huang Chao and Chang Hsiao, were to be beheaded. The rest of the story as to how Chang Hsiao was spared is similar to the previous account, that is, the emperor was moved by his filial piety and devised a straw effigy to take his place. There are still other versions, with which we will not be concerned here.

In sum, all these stories go to show that the straw effigy was a substitute for some living person whose crime can be redeemed by its destruction. The practice of the Lolo is based upon this theory as they believe that all the disasters of the family can be banished with the straw man through the incantations of the Pai-mao.

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(3) The Ritual of the Indoor Sacrifice

755 789 After the straw effigy was made, the Pai-mao placed a measure of grain by the doorsill inside the main entrance of the house. On one side of the grain was placed a bowl of rice, on which were an egg and a lump of salt; on the other side a cup of wine. Two cypress leaves were burned and dipped into a bowl of cold water to be used in the place of tea. Three cypress branches were stuck into the earth before the doorsill, on both sides of which stood chi-tsu and pu-tsu. While the branches were being stuck on the ground the human and horse effigies should face toward the house.

After the display the Pai-mao began his exorcising incantation. He first burned red hot a piece of rock, on which he threw water boiled in mulberry leaves. Over the rising vapor caused by the evaporation the priest held the sacrificial animal (pig, goat or chicken, depending upon the condition of the family), circling it around as he spat out a mouthful of wine on its body. This process is known as ta ts'u-tan, signifying the purification of the animal's body. With the Lolo, ta ts'u-tan is an important rite which must be held before the performance of any magic art. After this the Pai-mao, wielding a cypress wand, would mutter liturgies to drive away the evil 753 spirits. From their exorcising scriptures I have 787 gathered the following omens of disaster:
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1. A dog barking or wailing without reason.
2. A mother hog giving birth to a litter of four male piglets.
3. A female animal eating up her newly born.
4. A horse neighing during the night.
5. The horse saddle creaking.
6. The cock crowing erratically or before daybreak.
7. A cock aroused while roosting.
8. A hen laying small eggs.
9. A crow cawing.

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10. A pigeon roosting on the roof. 755
11. An ox tail circling round a tree trunk. 787
12. Snakes interweaving their tails. 789
13. Frogs mounting on each other's back.
14. A melon splitting by itself.
15. Insufficient crop yield.
16. Melon vines growing wild.
17. Portents in dreams.
    1. Marriage between parties not of the same generation.
    2. Man wearing clothes; woman discarding them.
    3. Dispatching soldiers toward evening with no road ahead.
    4. Feasting, dining and wining.
    5. Horseback riding.
    6. Fire burning by a man's pillow and things reduced to ashes by his feet.
    7. Woman breaking her ring or bracelet.
    8. Front teeth dropping off.

The above are evil portents to be shunned by the Lolo. When the Pai-mao recited liturgies 755 during the exorcising ceremony, he mentioned them 789 one by one regardless of whether the omens had already brought calamity to the dreamer or not. On reaching certain passages of the scripture the Pai-mao would toss out of the door the topmost cup of wine to offer to the evil spirit. At the same time another man, holding a young chicken (for the use of chick see my article "The Mythology of the Native Peoples in Yunnan," The Southwest Frontier Monthly, No.12) and a few stalks of rice straw, [29] would sweep the floor from the hall of worship to the animal stalls. Thus the evil spirits were swept off from all parts of the house as the Pai-mao continued with more incantations from the evil-exorcising scripture. The priest then turned the chi-tsu and pu-tsu around with their faces outward, showing that all the sins thus chanted

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789 out had been borne by the chi-tsu. Turning around toward the door the priest picked up a piece of charcoal, wrapped it up in straw and sprayed on it wine, tea and salt. Thereupon the Pai-mao threw out the package with all his might, and with it was gone forever all the ill luck in the house. After that the priest, holding the chick in one hand and a cypress wand in another, would tap at the walls and doors of all the rooms for fear that some spirits of disaster might be still lurking along the walls. The wand was used to frighten them away. By this time the indoor rite was over and the priest removed the chi-tsu and pu-tsu from the house for the outdoor rite.

II. The Outdoor Sacrifice

"Respect the spirits but keep away from them" is a realistic description of the psychology of the superstitious. Those who fear that the spirits may cause trouble and do not wish to offend them so as to court disaster must make sacrifices to the spirits in all deference. But they also fear that the spirits may hang around the house to start trouble and so they attempt to keep them away by hook or by crook. For this reason they paste at the gate door-gods and posters with rows of white hand designs. Among the former, Chiang Tai-kung is the most reverenced god among the Lolo, every home having at the gate the poster "T'ai-kung is here; all evil spirits be off". It is said that T'ai-kung is the administrator of all evil and noxious spirits. According to the Lolo when the spirits were appointed to their heavenly places, T'ai-kung was made a ts'u-t'an (vinegar and charcoal) god, whose duty it is to exorcise evil spirits just as ta ts'u-t'an is a means of purification. But this is only a preventive measure. When the disaster has already befallen, the only remedy is to ask the Pai-mao to expel all the evil influences from the house; and in case they

may return again the spirits are led far afield 755
to be given sacrifices so that they will loiter 789
away with a full stomach. The two evils most
feared by the Lolo as I have observed are the
demons of the underworld and the greedy and
corrupt officials of the human world for these
two are the sources of all their misfortune and
bankruptcy. The remedy is "to respect them but
also to keep away from them." So they are en-
tertained with wine and meat; as for the latter
they are also bribed with ts'ai-yen" [money and
opium]. (Readers should not think it curious. At 662
least it does not appear so to people living in
the Lolo district because when a committee man
or a government employee goes to the country on
official duty he is given, besides several thou-
sand dollars for traveling expenses, a few
ounces of opium. So the classical term "money
and silk" for bribery should be more properly
changed in current usage to "money and opium".)
For this reason the Lolo fear the officials more
than the spirits. A proverb says: "When an of-
ficial comes to the village, the people suffer
disaster". Is it not true? It is hoped that
there is a T'ai-kung among us who can extirpate
the corrupt officials in the human world.

The outdoor sacrifice is based upon the 755
foregoing psychology. The best place for it is 789
along the river banks, probably to enable the
spirits to flow away with the current. But the
locale I visited had suffered from the drought
terribly, there being barely a trickle of water
running in the sand at the bottom of the river.
I was rather worried for the family, fearing
that a river without water could not carry the
stubborn spirits away.

On arrival the Pai-mao chose a spot of firm 755
earth and planted in it cypress branches and 789
white fuel wood about a foot in height in serried 773
rows. It is said that the white firewood sticks
are the tablets for the spirits. The use of the

755 cypress branches is based upon a certain myth.
789 According to this story, in very early times when
773 heaven and earth were in a dark confusion and the people suffered greatly, the heavenly lord dispatched three Pai-mao to earth on the mission of rescuing the people. The priests rode on cow's backs, their scriptures tied to the horns of the cow. While crossing the ocean the scriptures got wet from the sea water, and so after reaching land the Pai-mao dried the books on the branches of a cypress tree. But the books stuck on the leaves and twigs, and a half of them were torn out. (Some say that it is the eagles that have clawed into the books; so today when the Pai-mao chants liturgies he wears a cap in the form of eagle's claws to represent the scriptures destroyed). Thus the scriptures used today represent only one half of the original, and the planted cypress branches are meant as a substitute for the lost books.

755 Having completed planting the sticks and the
789 spirit seats, the Pai-mao began chanting liturgies to invoke the spirit of the mountain to receive the sacrifice and to watch over the welfare of the family. This mountain spirit is equivalent to the Chinese earth god, because he is the administrator of the area. In all outdoor sacrifices an animal is used (generally a cock for the mountain spirit); so he receives quite a substantial offering.

755 After the sacrificial ceremony divination
789 was performed to find out whether it was good or
787 bad fortune. Divination is an essential part of the sacrificial rite, and the method used by the Lolo is very simple. The Pai-mao used a mulberry stem about three inches in length and a half inch in thickness. [30] This was sharpened at one end into the shape of a wedge and then split into two halves to form a divining tablet. At the time of divination, it was smeared with some chicken blood or wine. As the Pai-mao mumbled liturgies he

threw the tablet on the ground. If one surface of the split tablet faces upward and the other downward, it would bring good fortune; otherwise it would be bad fortune, and the whole process had to be started all over until good fortune appeared. 755 789 787

After good fortune was shown, the Pai-mao would then chant the scripture of sacrifice. The sacrifice itself took the following order: 755 789

1. Live Sacrifice. This was the sacrifice before slaughter.
2. Dead Sacrifice. After slaughter the carcass is offered for sacrifice.
3. Cooked Sacrifice. The meat is cooked and then offered for sacrifice.

The above three steps are essential in the sacrificial rites of the Lolo people.

After the cooked sacrifice the food was partaken of at a meal on the spot. I was invited to the picnic. We all did our best to finish up a roasted piglet, because the food offered in the outdoor sacrifice might not be brought back home for fear that the evil spirits might come back with it.

After supper darkness had already enveloped the earth; therefore, torches were lit for the evening ceremony. Shortly, the Pai-mao picked up the cypress wand and standing amidst the planted sticks, began to recite the liturgies aloud. He held in one hand several straw rings, with one of which he stroked the mistress of the family from head to foot, calling her by her name so as to rid her of bad luck. Then he hung the ring on the chi-tsu so that her misfortune, now gathered in the ring, would be taken over by the effigy. This rite was repeated on each and every member of the family. Next the Pai-mao took a rice spoon, into which the members of the family all expectorated, indicating that their misfortunes and diseases had all been spat out. The saliva was poured

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789 upon the chi-tsu. Both he and the pu-tsu were then taken down and offered before the spirit tablets for sacrifice, and after this they were burned among the branches planted on the ground. Thereupon three cypress branches were stuck horizontally on the ground as a sort of blockade to prevent the chi-tsu from coming back with the disaster. Later a straw rope was held by the Pai-mao at one end and the mistress of the family at the other, the former chanting liturgies and at the same time cutting the rope into three sections to indicate a permanent severance with disaster.

The final act was the cleansing three times by the vapor of the ts'u-t'an stone. The mistress of the family was kind and insisted that I follow her through the steaming vapor three times. In this way whatever misfortune that still clung to the body would be finally wiped away with the ts'u-t'an steam and sent to T'ai-kung to be suppressed.

That day was the last day of the fourth moon. In the pitch darkness I returned from the river bank with the mistress and her servants. As we trod along the uneven mountain path, several times I was in danger of falling down. Once when I climbed a steep stony slope, I slipped and nearly fell over the precipice. I complained to her: "Why did we not bring a torch with us?" She replied that any twig or leaf from the sacrificial ground might not be taken back for fear that misfortune would come back with us. She advised me to be brave and to continue climbing for since we had just come back from the exorcising ceremony, there could not be any disaster happening to us. I could not resist a laugh and said: "Thanks to your good intentions and to the ts'u-t'an cleansing, otherwise I would have been a cliff-fallen devil." The mistress laughed happily and gave me the feeling that the Lolo people are truly superstitious.

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I carefully climbed to the hilltop, and as I turned around to look at the altar of sacrifice below, I found the fire that had burned down the chi-tsu was still flickering. In front of me a light seemed to show the path. I thanked my hostess and went alone on my way home. 755 789

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[For information on the role of the Pai-mao (native Mayico-religious practitioner) in exorcism among the Black Lolo Cheh-i) of thc Wu-ting area in Yunnan, see category 116, pp. 1-12.]